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Cantarella

Story and Art by

YOU HIGURI

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& Cast of Characters

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Cesare Borgia

The hero of our story. His soul was sold to the devil by his father in exchange for the Papal throne, and he lives a harsh fate. Though consumed by the demons within, he is driven to follow his dream of unifying Italy. He used to hold a Cardinal position, but has finally returned to his secular life.

This work is fiction.

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◆ POPE ALEXANDER VI ◆

An ambitious man who sold his own son's soul to the devil in exchange for the Papal throne. He has solidified his authority through nepotism.

◆ MICHELOTTO (CHIARO) ◆

A legendary assassin who wears the mask of "Michelotto." He holds the power to repel the evil spirits possessing Cesare.

◆DELLA VOLPE◆

Cesare's loyal retainer since childhood. He looks up to Cesare for his tyrannical nature.

◆ LUCREZIA BORGIA ◆

A lovely girl who adores her older brother Cesare. After being wed for political convenience, she fell in love with Chiaro, but was once again turned into a political pawn through another marriage.

◆ALFONSO D'ARAGON◆

Sancia's brother, and the duke of Biscegile. He's in a marriage of political convenience with Lucrezia, but is in love with his older sister Sancia.

◆ SANCIA D'ARAGON◆

The wife of the Borgia family's third son, Jofre. The illegitimate princess child of the King of Naples, she has an uninhibited personality and is in a "relationship" with Cesare.

STORY SO FAR

While carrying Chiaro's child, Lucrezia is told by Cesare that her beloved Chiaro is dead. Lucrezia tries to kill herself in despair, but is stopped by Sancia, who gives her back the will to live.

Meanwhile, the wounded Chiaro makes it to Florence and meets up with Niccolo, who has since become a government secretariat, and who saves him.

Lucrezia gives birth to a baby boy who is taken immediately by Cesare's orders.

Lucrezia marries Alfonso, who is now Duke of Biscegile.

Cesare returns to secular life determined to enter the battlefield, himself... but what will that mean for everyone else?

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Various cities and territories of Italy during *Cantarella* period

(end of the 15th century)

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HE HAS BETRAYED ME BEFORE, BUT...IT IS WISE TO YIELD TO THE MORE POWERFUL FORCE.
SO, THEY'VE COME AT LAST, HAVE THEY?
PRE-PARE A PROPER GREETING FOR THEM.
zOOM
I'm reluctant, but still...
IT'S BEST IF I LIE LOW TO SAVE THE FRENCH KING SOME FACE, SINCE HE'S MEDIATING MY DISPUTE WITH THE POPE.
YOUR MAJESTY, CARDINAL ROVERE.
SIGNOR CESARE AND HIS MEN HAVE BEEN SIGHTED ON THE ROAD.

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I WILL GREET HIM PERSONALLY.
RAISE THE CASTLE GATES.
EITHER WAY, I HAVE TO PROTECT MYSELF.
YES, SIR.
I'LL HAVE PLENTY OF CHANCES TO MAKE A COMEBACK, LATER.
Oh, my

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YOU'VE MADE QUITE A JOURNEY.
IT'S BEEN SO LONG, YOUR EMINENCE CARDINAL CESARE BORGIA.
Ahem.
OH, THAT'S RIGHT. YOU NO LONGER HOLD THE TITLE OF CARDINAL.
DON'T YOU KNOW ANY-THING?
THEY'RE ON A MISSION FROM THE POPE.
CHARM
THEY'VE COME FROM ROME BEARING THE DOCU-MENTS WHICH ACKNOWLEDGE THE KING'S DIVORCE.
NO NO, I'VE AGED INTO A DODDER-ING OLD MAN.
BUT I APPRECIATE YOUR HOLINESS APPOINTING AN OLD FOOL LIKE ME RESIDENT AMBASSADOR HERE AT CASTLE AVIGNON.
PLEASE LET BYGONES BE BYGONES AND ENJOY THE LUXURIOUS ACCOMMO-DATIONS I HAVE PREPARED FOR YOU.
I HOPE THEY WILL EASE YOUR TRAVEL FATIGUE.
Ha ha ha!
I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE VELLETRI
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED AT ALL.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

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I SENSE SOMETHING TERRIFYING STRONGER THAN IT'S EVER BEEN.
HAS THERE BEEN SOME CHANGE SURROUNDING HIM?
HE'S NATURALLY MORE MATURE, BUT...IT'S SOMETHING ELSE...
AS THOUGH THE DEVIL HIMSELF IS RIGHT BESIDE ME.
I AM FEELING TRULY INSTINCTIVE FEAR.
HOW CAN AN OLD HAND LIKE ME FEAR THIS GREENHORN?
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
WHAT?

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EVEN AFTER FINDING ALL I COULD ABOUT THE SITUATION...
...I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW IT WILL PLAY OUT.
CALM DOWN. PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER.
I...I JUST REMEMBERED. THE KING OF FRANCE AND YOU...
...HAVE BETROTHED YOU TO THE DAUGHTER OF THE KING OF NAPLES, YES?
SHE MUST BE OVERJOYED TO HAVE A HUSBAND SUCH AS YOURSELF.
!?
DEPENDING ON THE ACTIONS OF FRANCE—
I'VE HEARD THAT AVIGNON...
...IS A TOWN THAT THE KING OF FRANCE, WHO ANNIHILATED THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR, WAS ABLE TO CHEAT AWAY FROM THE POPE.
THAT TALK IS A HUNDRED YEARS OLD.
A PAINFUL REMINDER OF THE CHURCH'S AUTHORITY FAILING.
COULD HE POSSIBLY KNOW THAT LOUIS XII IS NOT ONLY AFTER MILAN, BUT THE NAPLES HEGEMONY AS WELL?
NO
NEVER MIND...

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TO AVOID GOING DOWN THAT SAME ROAD ...
.I WILL ACT AS HIS HOLINESS' SPECIAL ENVOY TO GATHER INFORMATION..
...AND CONSTRUCT A PLAN TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE.
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT INHUMAN MEASURES THAT CALLS FOR..
BECAUSE IF I'M NOT PREPARED TO DO THAT, I CANNOT PROTECT THAT WHICH MUST BE KEPT SAFE.
I WILL NOT FORGIVE ANYONE WHO SULLIES POPE ALEXANDER VI'S GOLDEN STEER BANNER.
TAKE HEED.
AS FOR YOU..
I TRUST YOU WON'T BE PULLING THAT FOOLISH STUNT *EVER AGAIN.*
DELLA ROVERE.

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I...
I WON'T DO IT...!
WHAT WILL I DO?
I'M ALREADY ENGAGED. I CAN'T IMAGINE HAVING TO WED ANYONE ELSE!
I'M BEGGING YOU, PLEASE TALK TO THE KING FOR ME, QUEEN ANNE.
I MAY BE THE DAUGHTER OF THE KING OF NAPLES, BUT...
...MARRYING THE POPE'S ILLEGITIMATE SON BEARS TOO MUCH SHAME!

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OH, CHARLOTTE. PERFECT TIMING.
CAN YOU PLEASE COMFORT POOR CARLOTTA?
OH, MY.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
Waaah...
COM-PLAIN ALL YOU LIKE... MY HANDS ARE TIED.
THIS ISSUE INVOLVES WHOLE NATIONS, YOU MUST UNDER-STAND...
THE KING IS HASTENING HER MARRIAGE TO MASTER CESARE, BUT...
...AS YOU CAN SEE, SHE'S NOT THRILLED.
BUT LADY CARLOTTA, DIDN'T YOU SEE THE PARADE THAT CAME TO THE CASTLE?
HE'S SO BEAUTIFUL, HE HARDLY SEEMS OF THIS WORLD.
ISN'T IT WONDERFUL TO BE PURSUED BY SUCH A MAN?
Wow.
IF IT WERE ME...
...I'D BE THRILLED TO LET HIM SWEEP ME AWAY!

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OH DEAR, CARLOTTA'S IN SUCH A PICKLE.
SHE'LL RUIN HER PRETTY FACE WITH ALL THAT CRYING.
Waaah...
I...I DIDN'T MEAN...
SOB
STARTLE
YOU DON'T KNOW HOW I FEEL!
THEN WHY DON'T YOU MARRY HIM!?

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HM-HM. I SEE.
AND SO... ..I PRESENT YOU THE OFFICIAL DOCUMENT FROM HIS HOLINESS, THE POPE, RECOGNIZING YOUR DIVORCE FROM JEANNE DE VALOIS.
AND AS PROMISED... ..HERE IS THE POPE'S IMPERIAL PRESCRIPT TO SIGNOR D'AMBOISE, FOR THE CHARGE TO CARDINAL.
PLEASE LOOK IT OVER.
I HOLD THE HIGHEST RESPECT AND APPRECIATION FOR HIS HOLINESS' REGARDS...
...AND SO WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT YOU, SIGNOR CESARE, WITH THE POSITION AS DUKE OF OUR TERRITORY OF VALANCE
I ALSO PROMISE YOU THE TITLE AS A KNIGHT OF ST. MICHAEL, AND A LIFE PENSION OF THREE HUNDRED DUCAT.

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I HAPPILY ACCEPT YOUR GENEROSITY.
THAT'S SOME SPECIAL TREATMENT. I GUESS IT'S PROOF OF THE KING OF FRANCE'S REGARD FOR CORDIAL RELATIONS WITH THE POPE!
YOU THINK EVERY-THING'S ALRIGHT?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
IT'S BEEN TWO HOURS SINCE THE KING OF FRANCE WENT INTO MASTER CESARE'S CHAMBERS.
AND IT'S ALREADY FAR PAST MIDNIGHT.

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I AM SORRY TO KEEP YOU SO LATE.
BUT I'M PLEASED TO HAVE HAD SUCH A WORTHWHILE CONVERSATION WITH YOU TONIGHT.
RISE
YOU DON'T SUPPOSE THEY'RE HAVING A DISPUTE, DO YOU ...?
AS AM I, YOUR HIGHNESS.
NO.
LEAVE THEM AS THEY ARE.
ALLOW ME...
...TO CLOSE THE WINDOWS.

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I CAN'T STAND HOW THE FRENCH REEK OF COLOGNE.
IT SEEMS THE DAUGHTER OF THE KING OF NAPLES IS COMPLAINING.
SHE SAYS THAT MARRYING A POPE'S SON IS AN ABOMINABLE TABOO.
AND KING FREDERIGO OF NAPLES HAS FEW KIND THOUGHTS FOR THE BORGIA HOUSEHOLD.
WE SHOULDN'T EXTORT HIM ANY MORE THAN WE ALREADY HAVE.
MY, HOW QUICKLY NEWS SPREADS.
WHY ARE YOU SO JOYOUS?
JOYOUS? IS THAT HOW I LOOK?

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AS I SUSPECTED, LOUIS IS AFTER THE SAME PRIZE THE LATE CHARLES WAS.
THE HEGEMONY OF NAPLES.
AS THINGS STAND, WHETHER I SIDE WITH NAPLES OR WITH FRANCE...
...THE OUT-COME WILL DICTATE ITSELF.
UNLIKE CHARLES, HE'S IN GOOD FAVOR WITH THE BORGIAS.
THERE'S AN ORDER TO THINGS, VOLPE.
RUSHING IS FUTILE.
THERE'S NOTHING YOU NEED TO MAKE UP TO LOUIS FOR—
I WILL ADMIT TO BEING AMUSED AT HOW THE CROSSROADS OF PEOPLE'S FATES DIVERGE.
LIKE PIECES ON A GAME BOARD.

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WHEN I SERVED IN THE PRIEST-HOOD...
...OUR COUNTRY HAD NO ARMY.
BUT WE HAVE ONE NOW WHICH WILL ALLOW THE PAPAL TERRITORIES TO EXPAND. ISN'T THAT THE QUICKEST ROUTE TO WIELDING THIS COUNTRY'S POWER?
STARTING NOW...
...THINGS WILL GET INTEREST-ING.
LADY CHAR-LOTTE!
YOUR FATHER'S CALLING FOR YOU.
HE SAYS IT'S URGENT.

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HMM.
ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT FROM THE KING OF FRANCE, YOUR SUITOR IS...
...CESARE BORGIA, DUKE OF VALENTI-NOIS.
!?
HUH...?
A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL FOR ME?
WELL, WHO...
...MAY I ASK, IS IT FROM?
!?
PLEASE CONTINUE THESE TALKS WITH HIM!
NO!
CHAR-LOTTE?
BUT IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE IDEA—
IT SEEMS QUEEN ANNE PUT IN A GOOD WORD FOR YOU.
THE KING SEEMS QUITE EAGER.. HE RE-QUESTS AN IMMEDIATE REPLY.

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I DON'T CARE!!
I NEVER DARED EVEN DREAM OF THIS!
ME? MARRYING THAT MAN? OH...DEAR LORD!
INDEED, IT'S LIKE YOU'RE STANDING IN FOR THE RELUCTANT CARLOTTA—
ARE YOU SURE?
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE ILLEGITIMATE BORGIA CHILD WITH THE ILL REPUTATION.
I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT MAN, SO LIKE THE GREAT ANGEL MICHAEL HIMSELF, WOULD SWOOP DOWN UPON ME, OF ALL PEOPLE!!
Rome, The Vatican

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WHAT!?
PERMISSION WAS GRANTED FOR CESARE TO WED THE PRINCESS OF KING NAVARRE!?
KING NAVARRE IS THE FRENCH KING LOUIS XII'S COUSIN.
WHY WOULD HE BE PLOTTING TO STRENGTHEN HIS TIES TO NAPLES NOW!?
WE MUST ENQUIRE AS TO CESARE'S INTENTIONS AT ONCE!

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WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME IS HE PLANNING...?
IS SOMETHING WRONG? YOU LOOK PALE.
CARDINAL ASCANIO SFORZA.
OH, I'M SORRY FOR MAKING YOU WAIT.
DUKE OF BISCEGLIE, ALFONSO.
FROM NOW ON...
...IF I'M SEEN WITH YOU IN THE VATICAN, THINGS COULD GET UGLY.
OH? HAS THE SITUATION GOTTEN A LITTLE COMPLICATED?
THIS REPORT JUST CAME IN FROM ONE OF MY SPIES.
THE DUKE OF VALENTINOIS HAS PLEDGED FULL COOPERATION WITH THE KING OF FRANCE FOR THE SUBJUGATION OF MILAN AND NAPLES.

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HOW CAN YOU BE SO CARE-FREE!?
Whoa!
WELL, THERE'S NO POINT IN FRETTING OVER IT NOW.
WELL, WELL.
IF IT'S MILAN, THAT'S TROUBLE FOR YOU.
AND IF NAPLES, TROUBLE FOR ME.
THE DUKE OF VALEN-TINOIS?
CESARE BORGIA.
IN RETURN OF THE FAVOR, THE FRENCH KING WILL SEND HIM AN ARMY.
I'VE HEARD THAT CESARE MEANS TO ACCEPT A FRENCH WIFE FROM THE OTHER SIDE.
THAT'S HIS PLEDGE IN THIS WHOLE DEAL.
I SWEAR, A VICTORY EVEN IN DEFEAT...IS HOW THAT MAN LIVES.

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LET'S DO WHAT CARDINAL ASCANIO SAID.
IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO YOU...
PRINCE!
I PLAN ON LEAVING ROME BEFORE I FIND MYSELF IN DANGER.
YOU SHOULD DO THE SAME.
AS YOUR GUARDIAN... ...THAT IS MY BEST ADVICE.
I CAN'T JUST LEAVE HER ALONE.
WHY ...?
I CAN'T DO THAT.
I'M SORRY.
BUT...YOU MEAN LADY LUCREZIA?

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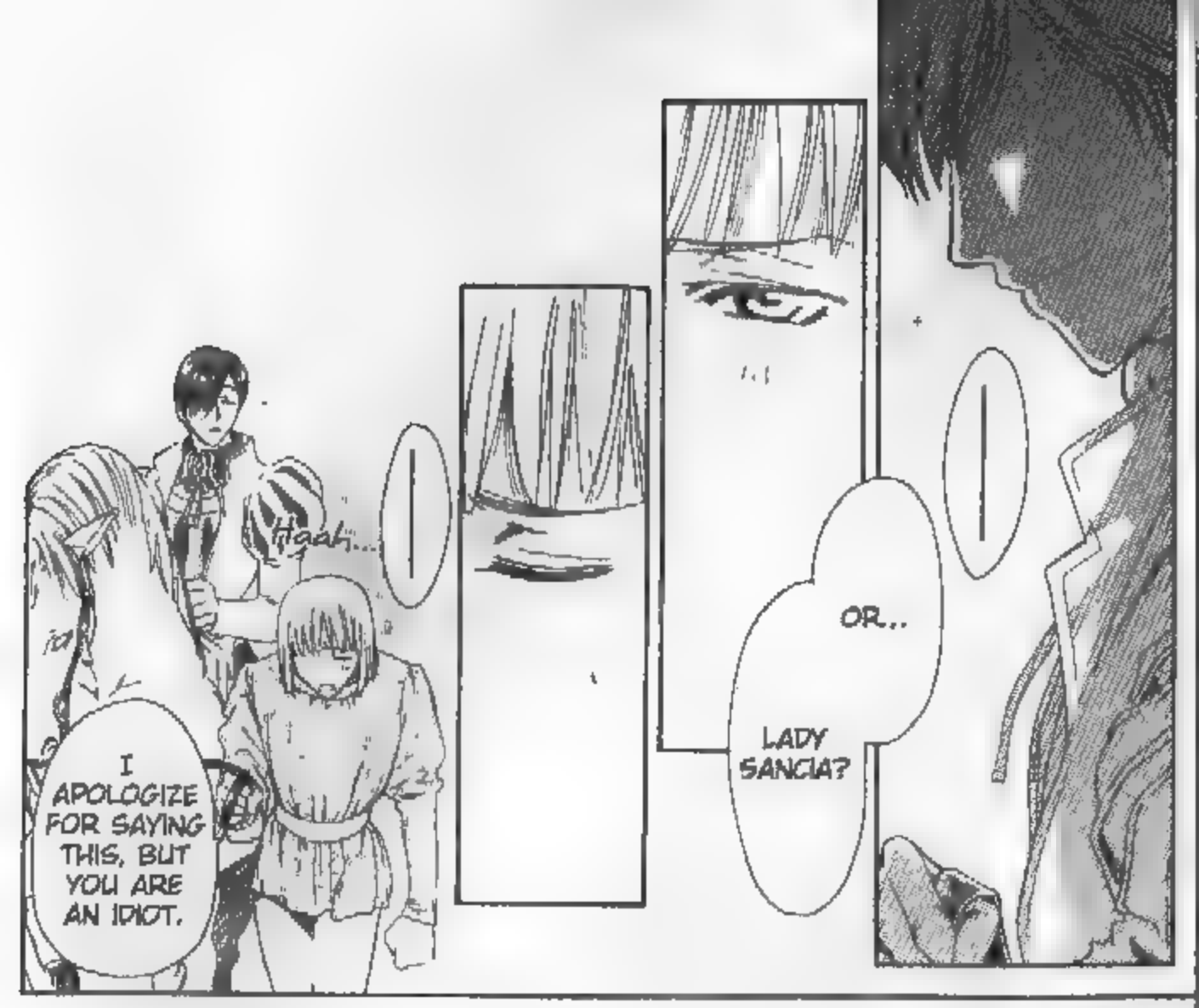

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HMPH!
OH...I'M SORRY.
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU? I'VE BEEN CALLING YOUR NAME.
LUCREZIA.
LUCREZIA!
GASP!
OH, SANCIA.
WHEN TWO BEAUTIFUL NOBLEWOMEN WALK TOGETHER, MEN HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION.
WHY NOT TAKE A WALK TO BRIGHTEN YOUR MOOD?
YES...IT SEEMS HE IS.
...GETTING MARRIED, I HEAR.
SO CESARE IS...

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...HE'S MORE LIKE A JAILER NAMED "BROTHER."
I KNOW HE'S NOT A STRANGER.
BUT...
COME NOW. WHY ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT HIM LIKE HE'S A STRANGER?
I'M FINE...
AND YOU JUST ACCEPT IT?
THIS WILL BE EASIEST ON MY HEART.
A HA HA!
THAT'S ONE WAY TO PUT IT.
IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO PUT IT.

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I HAD SOME MINOR BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO AND JUST GOT BACK.
ARE YOU TWO TAKING A WALK?
AL-FONSO.
WHAT THE--!?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
SANCIA'S ACTING STRANGE
I'D NEVER BE SO RUDE AS TO INTERRUPT A MARRIED COUPLE'S PRIVATE TIME.
SANCIA?
TURN
SEE YOU.
LUCRE-ZIA.

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I HAVE NEWS ...
...RE-GARDING THE SEARCH FOR CHIARO.
I'M SORRY, BUT...
...THINGS HAVE GOTTEN DIFFICULT...
YOU KNOW, RIGHT? LATELY...
...I'M BEING FOLLOWED.
!?
IS IT...MY BROTHER'S DOING?
I'VE BEEN MARKED AS A CHARACTER WHO REQUIRES SPECIAL ATTENTION.
IF IT MEANS BRINGING DANGER UPON YOURSELF, DON'T PUSH IT.
AS FAR AS HE GOES... I'VE GIVEN UP—
—ARIA.

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AS LONG AS THERE'S HOPE... ...YOU CAN GO ON LIVING WHILE GRASPING TIGHT ONTO IT.
BUT IF YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT...
ARE YOU... ...REALLY AT PEACE WITH THAT?
CHIARO IS ALIVE.
IF IT MEANS ANYTHING, EVEN SIGNOR CESARE BELIEVES THAT.
...AND IF YOU FORGET IT... ...THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN GO ON.
!?
WHY WOULD MY BROTHER ...?

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BUT...
I HAVE THE FEELING... THAT'S NOT ALL.
BECAUSE HE TARNISHED THE BORGIA FAMILY REPUTATION...
...I KNOW HOW MUCH MY BROTHER DESPISES CHIARO.
WHAT I'VE SEEN...IN HIS EYES ARE...
EVEN THOUGH ...
...I...
...BETRAYED HIM.
EVEN THOUGH HE WAS THE ONE PERSON I MUST NEVER BETRAY...

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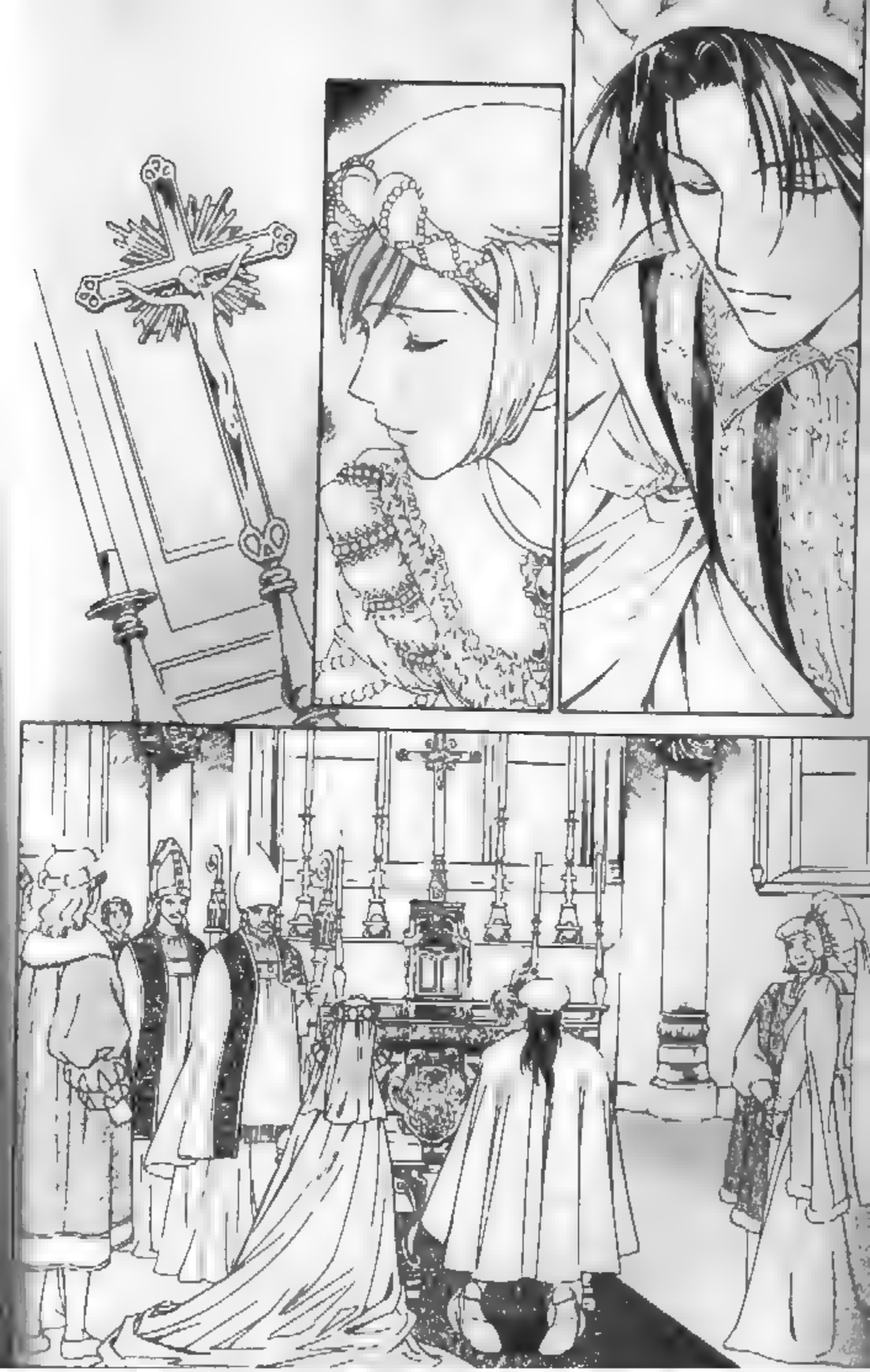

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...AS PART OF THE FRENCH ROYAL FAMILY, YES?
WHICH SECURES THE BORGIA HOUSE-HOLD'S PLACE...
DUKE OF VALENTINOIS, A KNIGHT OF ST. MICHAEL, CESARE BORGIA DE FRANCIA.
THE MARRIAG BETWEE CESAR BORGI DUKE VALEN TINOIS.
...AND THE DAUGHTER OF KING NAVARRE, CHARLOTTE D'ALBRET .
...HAS OCCURRED WITH NO SETBACKS, AT AMBOISE CASTLE.

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AL-RIGHT.
SORRY, OLD MAN, I NEED TO BORROW CHIARO.
W... WAIT!
WHAT'S THIS? I'M AT WORK.
I'M IN A HURRY, YOU UNDER-STAND.
I NEED TO ASK A FAVOR.
WOULD YOU COME TO FORLI WITH ME?
I HAVE TO GO NEGOTIATE SOME MERCENARY CONTRACTS.
I HAVE NO VICE-ENVOYS, AND I DON'T WANT TO TRAVEL ALONE.
WHY ME?
ISN'T THIS SECRETARIAT WORK?
YEAH, THAAAAT☆ BUT, I'VE HEARD THAT THE ONE I HAVE TO NEGOTIATE WITH IS VERY TOUGH.

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I'D FEEL BETTER IF YOU WERE WITH ME.
WILL YOU COME?
I CAN'T REFUSE YOU.
BUT YOU KNOW I WON'T BE ANY HELP IN YOUR NEGOTIA-TIONS.
GOOD, IT'S SETTLED.
I'LL TALK TO YOUR WINERY BOSSES, SO GET READY RIGHT NOW.
WELL, IT'S A BIG JOB FOR ME.
I'VE GOT TO TIE MY FUNDOSHI* TIGHT!
YOU REALLY ARE IN A HURRY.
*Fundoshi = A sumo wrestler's loincloth.
*They do not
Do fundoshi exist in Italy??
IS HE...
...REALLY THAT SCARY AN OPPO-NENT?
IT'S A WOMAN.
HUH?
BUT NO ORDINARY WOMAN.
SHE STRAPS ON ARMOR AND LEADS FROM THE FRONT LINES OF BATTLE, A WOMAN WITH TRUE SPIRIT AND COURAGE.

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THEY CALL HER THE VIRAGO, SIGNORA CATERINA SFORZA.
SO I HAVE BEEN ORDERED...
...TO NOT ONLY RENEW THE MERCENARIES' CONTRACT, BUT BEAT DOWN THE PRICE OF THEIR WAGES.
BUT I SWEAR, HER SON IS THE EPITOME OF AN IMBECILE!
...THAT SERVES AS AN ESSENTIAL FORTRESS.
TO FLORENCE FORLI IS A SMALL COUNTRY.
FORLI
FIRENZE
I UNDERSTAND.
IF YOU'RE PUTTING YOURSELF IN DANGER, OF COURSE I'LL PROTECT YOU.
FLORENCE HIRED CATERINA'S SON AS GENERAL OF THE MERCENARY ARMY TO KEEP CORDIAL RELATIONS FROM CRUMBLING.

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HAVING YOU WITH ME IS LIKE HAVING A HUNDRED MEN.
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT...
I thought you were heading for magnificent, not a user.
WHY AM I FEELING THIS VAGUE EXCITEMENT?
MY LIFE AT THE WINERY ISN'T BAD...
IT'S JUST... UNSATISFYING.
COULD IT BE THAT FIGHTING'S INGRAINED IN MY BODY?

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EVEN AFTER BETRAYING THE ONE MASTER I SHOULD HAVE PROTECTED COST ME MY RIGHT ARM...
...I STILL...
THE PREPARATIONS ARE COMPLETE.
WE CAN BEGIN OUR ATTACK ON MILAN SOON
CESARE, YOU'LL ACCOMPANY ME?
OF COURSE. YOUR MAJESTY.
TMP TMP

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MASTER CESARE ...
PLEASE... LOOK BACK AT LEAST ONCE...
PLEASE...
THERE WAS NOTHING TO SAY.
WHY DID YOU SAY NOTHING TO LADY CHARLOTTE?
IT'S NOT TO CHARLOTTE...
...BUT TO THIS COUNTRY THAT I AM MARRIED.

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COUNT-
ESS.
THE ENVOY FROM FLORENCE HAS ARRIVED. WHAT SHALL WE DO?
AAH, REGARDING THAT MATTER WITH THE MERCENARIES, YES?
HMPH.
I'M BUSY, NOW.
TELL HIM I'LL SEE HIM IN THE AFTERNOON.

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WHAT COLD TREATMENT. I'M NOT FEELING GOOD ABOUT THE OUTCOME.
I WAS HOPING WE'D GET IN QUICKLY, SETTLE THE MATTER, AND GET OUT OF FORLI...
HAAH ...
THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO. WE SHOULD HAVE MADE AN APPOINTMENT.
DANG THAT COUNTESS!
SHE'S JUST TAKING ME LIGHTLY BECAUSE I'M SOME LITTLE DIPLOMAT WHO CAME WITHOUT ADJUTANTS.

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THE SON OF THE COUNTESS.
WHISPR
WHISPR
THE IMBECILE?
I CAN HEAR YOU!!
WHO?
OTTAVIANO RIARIO...
ME?
I'M OTTAVIANO. AND YOU, OLD MAN, MUST BE THE ENVOY COMING ALL THE WAY FROM FLORENCE TO HAGGLE DOWN MY MERCENARY WAGES.
TAKE A LOOK. DAY AND NIGHT, I TRAIN MY MEN RIGOROUSLY.
SO DON'T PULL YOUR PETTINESS ON ME.
I'M WORKING MYSELF TO THE BONE FOR YOUR MEASLY COUNTRY.
DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME NEGOTIATING JUST SCRAM HOME TO FLORENCE
QUIT RAMBLING.
YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW MY COUNTRY FEELS—
...YOU'VE NEVER FOUGHT ON THE FRONT LINES.
YES, SIGN OTT AND

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URGH ...!
THUD
HOW DARE YOU TRY TO CHEAT US!
DIDN'T THAT FIRST HOLE I PUT THROUGH YOUR ROBE TEACH YOU ANYTHING!?
OOPS, SORRY.
I MUST HAVE HIT YOU RIGHT IN THE SOLAR PLEXUS.
COUGH COUGH COUGH
...IS YOURS, I BELIEVE.
THIS ...

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I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT...
...YOU REALLY SAVED US.
THE BOY HAS NO IDEA HOW TO JUDGE THE RELATIVE POWER OF HIS OPPONENT.
IF HE'D TAKEN YOU ON, HE'D HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY INJURED.
UNDERSTOOD.
MASTER OTTAVIANO.
H... HMPH!
I WAS JUST TEASING HIM.
DON'T TELL MY MOTHER.
I AM GENERAL OF THE MERCENARY ARMY AND CHAMBERLAIN OF IMOLA.
DIONISI NARDI.
SIT
THIS IS MY RETAINER, CHIARO.
I AM NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, THE DIPLOMAT FROM FLORENCE.
SO, YOU'RE THE RENOWNED SIGNOR NARDI!

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I SEE.
IT'S COME NATURALLY TO ME SINCE I WAS A CHILD.
I WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED, OTHERWISE.
HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED BECOMING A MERCENARY?
WHERE...DID YOU LEARN YOUR SWORDSMANSHIP?
CHIARO.
NICCOLO.
RIGHT?
...HE'S NOT MADE TO SERVE AS A MERCENARY.
P...PLEASE WAIT. YOU CAN'T TAKE HIM. HE'S MY BODYGUARD... AND FIRST AND FOREMOST...
I...
I AM WITHOUT MY DOMINANT ARM.

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I MAY ONLY HAVE YOUR SWORD TO JUDGE BY, BUT...
...I DOUBT THAT'S THE ONLY PROOF OF YOUR STRENGTH.
I SENSE AN INDOMITABLE SPIRIT.
IT PLEASES ME TO MEET A MAN SUCH AS YOURSELF.
WE...
...SHALL MEET AGAIN.
CLIK
WHAT AN IMPRES-SIVE MAN.

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MERCENARIES ARE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS WHO SERVE ON THE BASIS OF A CONTRACT.
THEY TAKE NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR ACTIONS AND WILL DOUBLE-CROSS ANYONE IF IT MEANS HIGHER PAY.
NIC-COLO?
I'VE HAD MY DOUBTS ABOUT THAT INSTITUTION SINCE LONG AGO.
I'M TELLING YOU.
YOU CAN'T BECOME A MERCENARY, CHIARO!
LOOK AT THE LATE CHARLES VIII'S SITUATION I SWEAR—
...WE'RE SO OFTEN THREATENED BY OTHER COUNTRIES. MERCENARIES ARE UNRELI-ABLE AS PROTECTORS.
THANKS TO THAT OLD-FASHIONED SYSTEM...
A MERCENARY?
WHY AM I SO EXCITED?

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CHIARO ?
Come on, listen when someone's speaking to you.
I'M TELLING YOU, WE HAVE A RECEIPT. A RECEIPT!
AD-DRESSED BY THE FLORENCE SECRE-TARIAT.
HM? WHERE'S THAT?
I CAN'T BELIEVE WE HAVE TO ARRANGE FOR OUR OWN LODGING.
THIS SITUATION IS PRETTY UGLY.
PHEW.
IT FINALLY GOT SETTLED.

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THIS TIME, I WANT TO SEE AND KNOW EVERYTHING... WITH MY OWN POWER.
BESIDES, I THINK BEING A DIPLOMAT'S A GOOD JOB.
SO DILI-GENT.
IF MY ACHIEVEMENTS AREN'T ACK-NOWLEDGED, I CAN'T ASCEND THE HIERARCHY.
Oh, by the way.
I HAVE TO WRITE A REPORT, SO...
...YOU CAN WALK AROUND OUTSIDE, IF YOU LIKE.
TO DEVIATE FROM THAT... MEANS CERTAIN MISFORTUNE.
HUMANS OCCUPY ONLY A CERTAIN SCALE.
IT WASN'T EASY FOR ME TO HAVE BEEN GRANTED INHUMAN POWERS.
I'VE HEARD THAT RIGHT NOW HE IS WITH LOUIS XII, CROSSING THE ALPS TOWARD MILAN.
THAT MAN... SIGNOR CESARE.
LIKE THAT MAN.

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YOU DIDN'T KNOW?
IT'S PURELY A MARRIAGE OF POLITICAL CONVENIENCE.
WITH SO MANY DISLOYAL ACTIONS AND PLENTIFUL BACKSTABBERS, MILAN HAS NO ALLIES IN ALL OF ITALY. NOT TO MENTION THAT SIGNOR CESARE'S MARRIAGE MEANS FRANCE HAS BEEN GRANTED THE VATICAN'S BLESSING TO PUSH INTO ITALY WITH IMPUNITY.
MARRIAGE... CESARE?
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE IT FALLS.
HE WED THE DAUGHTER OF A COUSIN OF THE FRENCH KING, PUTTING HIMSELF IN THEIR FAMILY, AND WINNING NOT ONLY THE FRENCH KING'S BACKING, BUT AN ARMY, AS WELL.
AND ALL IT TOOK WAS TURNING MILAN AND NAPLES INTO HUMAN SACRIFICES.
IF IT GETS HIM WHAT HE WANTS, HE DOESN'T CARE WHAT IT TAKES.
I AGREE WITH THAT, BUT...
...I NEVER THOUGHT HE'D SELL HIS OWN COUNTRYMEN TO ANOTHER NATION.

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FROM THIS POINT ON, ITALY'S CHAOS AND CONFUSION ...
...WILL BE AT THE HANDS OF CESARE BORGIA.
THERE IS NO LIMIT TO HIS AMBITION.
I...
I WONDER IF SOMEDAY...I WILL KILL YOU WITH MY OWN HANDS.
JUST AS I PROMISED THAT DAY.

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!?
WHAT'S WITH THIS CROWD?
...FOR WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU OPPOSE LADY CATERINA.
THIS SERVES AS A WARNING...
HH
MURMUR
SCARY...
THEY SAY THEY'RE REFUGEES FROM THE VENETIAN GUERILLAS.
!?
YOU THERE!
OUT OF THE WAY, OR I'LL CRUSH YOU UNDER-FOOT!
A RULER WHO WOULD GOVERN US KINDLY.
IF ONLY SHE WERE MORE LIKE SIGNOR ASTORE OF FLORENCE.
...I'VE HEARD YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN SHE'LL AIM HER ATTACK TOWARD US.
AND ..
...SHE'S RULED THIS TOWN SINGLE-HANDEDLY FROM THE FEUDAL LORD FAMILY, MAKING IT SUFFER FROM HER HARSH-NESS.

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FISH ...
NOW I'M REALLY MAD! DRAW YOUR WEAPON!
DON'T MESS WITH ME!
OH, SORRY.
I DON'T CARE TO GIVE YOU MY NAME
THIS TIME, I'LL CHOP YOU LIKE A—
I DREW MY WEAPON.
YOU GONNA DO ANY-THING?
GLOOOOOM
URR...

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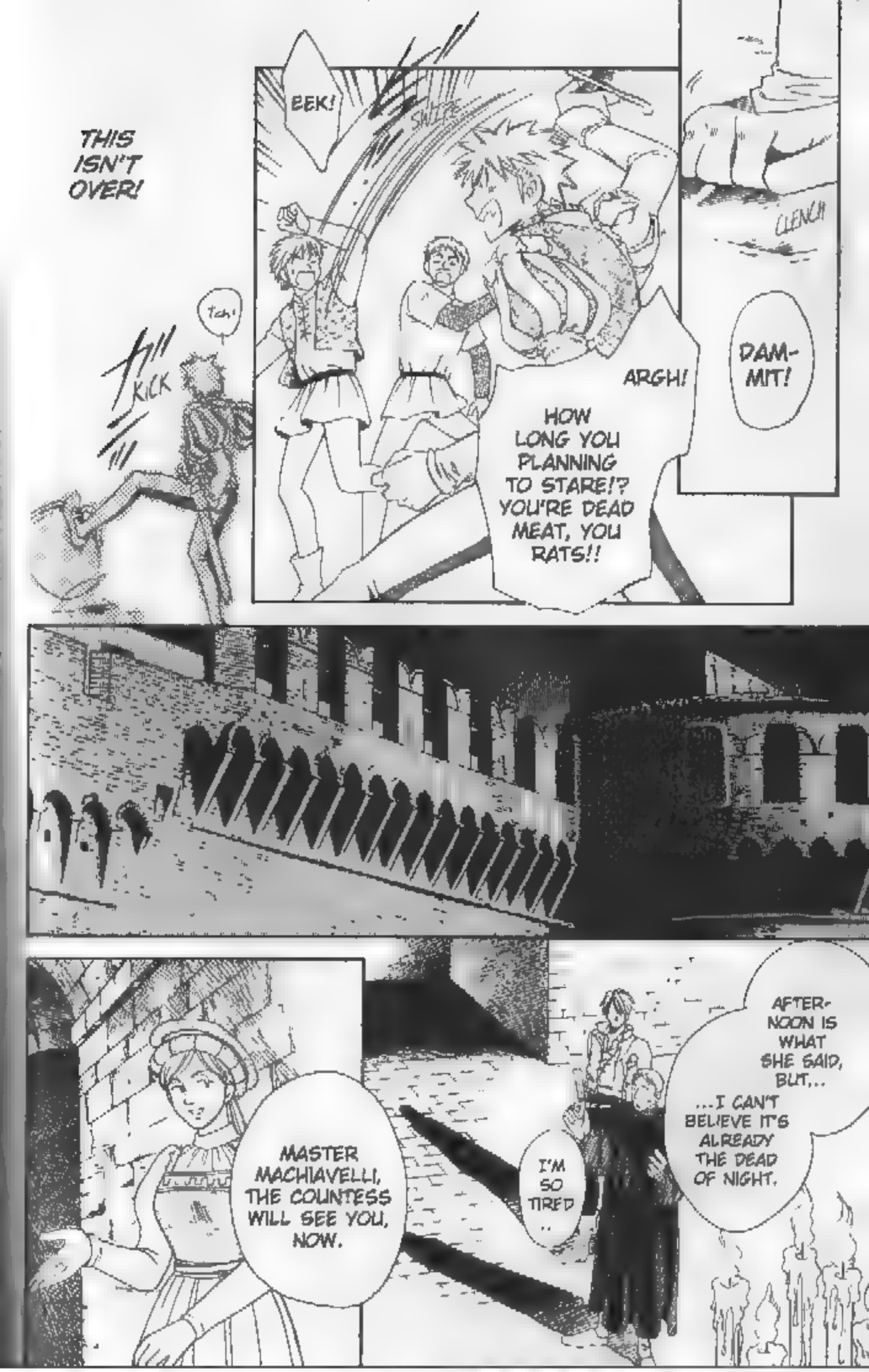

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OH, MY.
YOU'LL BE ALRIGHT?
I DOUBT SHE'LL TRY TO EAT ME.
GUESS WE'VE GOT NO CHOICE, CHIARO. PLEASE WAIT FOR ME.
OH...YOUR ESCORT MUST WAIT IN A SEPARATE ROOM.
STILL...
...THIS IS SOME STRONGHOLD.
GASP

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I SENSE PEOPLE NEARBY...!!
IT'S TOO DARK TO BE SURE, BUT I SAW SOMETHING FLASH IN THE SHADOW OF THE CANDLE STAND.
IT'S ONE... NO.
I'D GUESS FIVE OR SIX, AT THE LEAST.
WHAT DO THEY WANT...!?
FAZ!

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WHO WERE THEY...?
WELL, I'LL BE TAKING MY LEAVE NOW.
COUNTESS.
DELEGATES FROM THE MILAN COURT.
TALKS WITH MY LAST GUEST RAN OVER-TIME.
I APOLOGIZE FOR MAKING YOU WAIT SO LONG.
TH... THAT'S ...!
I'M SURE YOU KNOW THAT THE FRENCH ARMY IS ADVANCING ON MILAN
THE MILAN GOVERNMENT HAS ASKED ME TO SEND SOLDIERS IMMEDIATELY.

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I HAVE COME PREPARED TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SATISFY YOU, LADY CATERINA.
I CERTAINLY INTEND TO PAY THE MERCENARY WAGE AT 10,000 FIORINO.
I'M SURE YOU ARE AWARE OF HOW CRUCIAL FORLI SOLDIERS ARE AS PROTECTORS OF PISA.
I HAVE COME TODAY REGARDING THE MERCENARY CONTRACTS.
BUT, OUR COUNTRY IS A SMALL ONE.
AND OUR ARMY IS LIMITED.
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T MEAN 10,500?
10,000 ...?
HMPH.
EVERYONE TAKES FORLI SO LIGHTLY.
IS NOT MY TERRITORY ACTING AS A CUSHION FOR YOUR COUNTRY AND VENICE?
HM ...
THINK IT OVER ...
...CAREFULLY.

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THAT MEANS ...
...THEY WERE ORGANIZED AND SENT BY SOME SHADY SOURCE.
WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THEM?
THEY CAME AT ME FROM NOWHERE.
I DON'T KNOW.
JUST TO BE SURE, I KNOCKED THEM OUT WITH THE HILT OF MY SWORD.
I have no idea what this is all about
HM...IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS...
YOU SURE THAT'S A GOOD IDEA?
...WE NEED TO AVOID ANY CONFUSION.
PRETEND YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED!
SEE?
WHAT'D I TELL YOU!?
Fwa!

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HMM.
HE WIPED OUT ALL SIX OF THEM!
I'VE NEVER SEEN TALENT LIKE HIS!
THERE'S ALSO A PROBLEM WITH OUR MERCENARIES...
HEY, MOM.
I WANT THE FLORENCIAN'S ESCORT.
MAKE IT HAPPEN!
WITH HIM IN MY ARMY...
...WE'LL ACHIEVE EVEN MORE.
HUH!?

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I JUST RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTESS.
SHE SAID THAT IF YOU JOIN OTTAVIANO'S ARMY, I WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THE NEGOTIATIONS.
!?
WHY ME?
WELL ...
BECAUSE OF...
IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE FACING TOUGH NEGOTIA-TIONS.
I SAW YOUR FACE FALL.
...WHA HAPPEN LAST NIGHT
DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S AWFULLY SUSPI-CIOUS?
EVEN SO, THIS IS NOT YOUR AFFAIR, SO I WILL DECLINE ON YOUR ACCOUNT.
I'LL HANDLE THEM.
I SHOULD BE ABLE TO, BEING A DIPLOMAT AND ALL.
I'LL DO IT.

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IF SOMEONE WANTS TO HIRE ME, I'LL LET THEM.
IT'S IN MY BLOOD, EVEN WITH THIS BODY.
WHAT!?
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? I SAID I'LL DO IT.
I DON'T KNOW ...
THAT MAY BE TRUE, BUT...
WHO'D WILLINGLY JOIN THAT IMBECILE...?
IF I CAN'T SWING MY SWORD...I CAN'T KNOW PEACE.
CHIARO ...
AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THIS MERCENARY SYSTEM...IS NOTHING FOR ME TO WORRY ABOUT.
STRANGELY ENOUGH, EVEN THE ART ABOUT THEIR LACK OF LOYALTY.

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YOU... STILL...
AM I STILL... TIED TO CESARE?
EVEN AFTER I HAVE BEEN SO CHANGED, IS HE STILL MY SWORD'S ONLY MASTER?
NO, I DIDN'T MEAN THAT...
AM I... ...BEING UNFAIR?
HEH.
WHY DO YOU SAY THAT? I'M GOING OF MY OWN ACCORD.
I PREFER NOT HAVING A "MASTER".
NO...
NEVER MIND.

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DO AS YOU PLEASE.
I'LL LET THE MEN AT THE WINERY KNOW.
IF YOU TELL ME...
...TO RETURN, THEN—
WILL YOU NOT BE... RETURNING TO FLORENCE?
THANKS TO YOU...
...MY NEGOTIATIONS WILL GO SMOOTHLY.
WHY?
AFTER YOU WENT OUT OF YOUR WAY TO INTRODUCE ME TO THEM...I'M SORRY.

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DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT
I SAVED MYSELF 3,000.
10,200 FIORINO, HUH? YOUR OPPONENT REALLY IS STUBBORN.
I GUESS MY BECOMING A MERCENARY DIDN'T GIVE YOU ANY ADVANTAGE.
AND I KNOW THAT FORLI AND FLORENCE ARE OFFICIALLY ALLIES, NOW.
THINGS WORKED OUT WONDERFULLY
IT'S A CHARM.
FOR GOOD LUCK.
I THOUGHT YOU'D GIVEN UP USING MAGIC.
SWEEP....
CHIARO.
WHAT?

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WITHIN A SHADOW DEEPER EVEN THAN HIS PROFOUND SADNESS...
A WAILING AS OF A TREMOR THAT SHAKES THE EARTH...
...THAT NOT EVEN SCREAMS CAN PENETRATE...
NOT EVEN "GOD" CAN COMPENSATE HIS STARVATION.
HIS SOUL IS IMPRISONED IN AN ETERNAL HELL...

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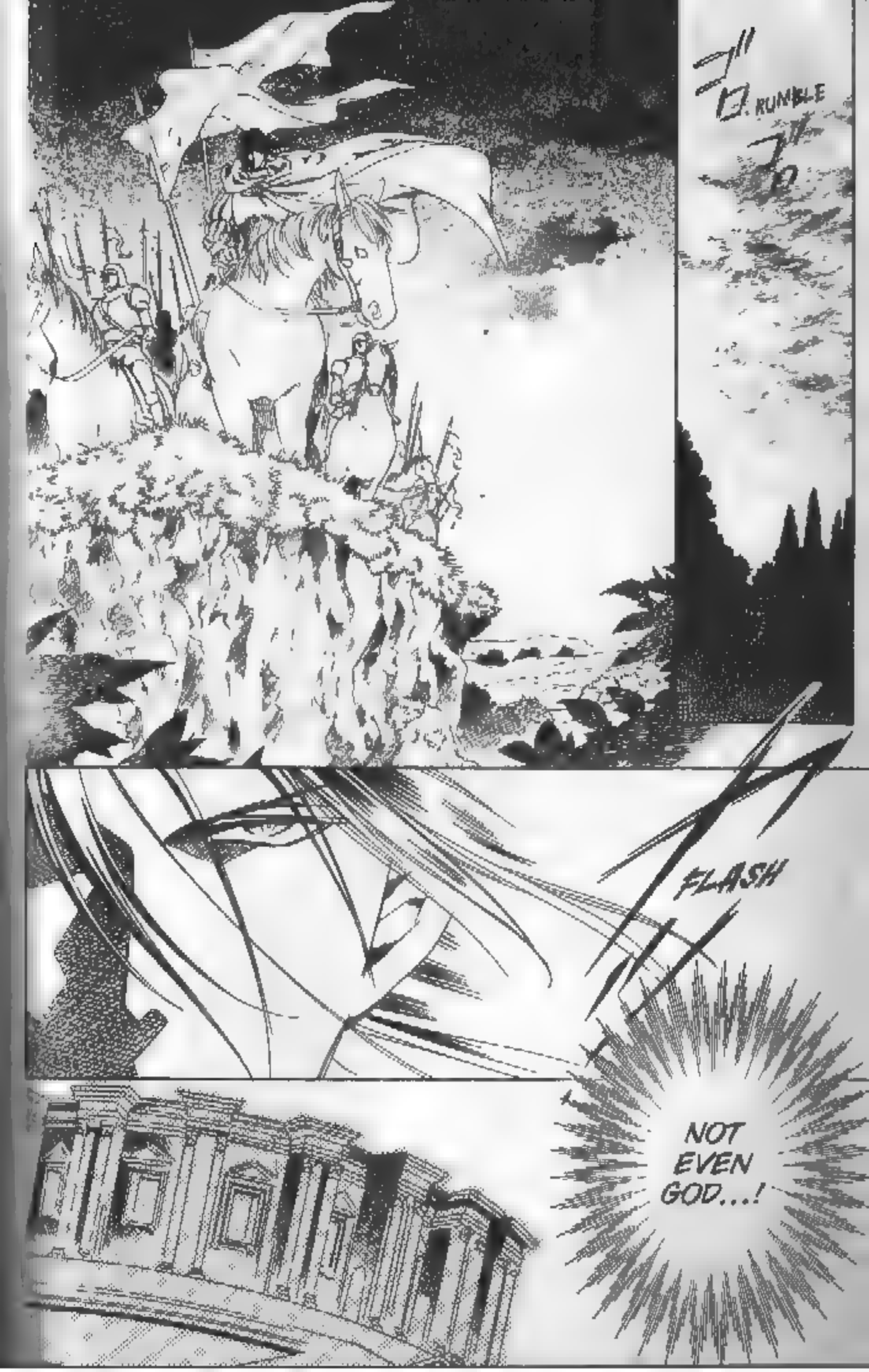

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KNOCK
KNOCK
ALFONSO.
OPEN UP. IT'S ME.
WELL, WELL.
WHAT'S WRONG THAT YOU VISIT ME SO LATE AT NIGHT?
YOU MUST LEAVE HERE AT ONCE.
OUR GUARDIAN CARDINAL ASCANIO HAS FLED ROME.
IT'S DANGEROUS FOR YOU TO STAY.

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HOW CAN YOU BE SO CASUAL?
CARDINAL ASCANIO TOLD ME THIS, HIMSELF.
WITH CESARE ON THE FRENCH SIDE, HE INTENDS TO TURN HIS BACK ON OUR NAPLES!
I'M SO HAPPY.
I NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D BE SO WORRIED ABOUT ME.
AT THIS POINT, I'LL HAVE TO SEDUCE THE POPE.
ND...
I'LL BE FINE. I'M A LADY.
NO, THANKS.
YOU ARE THE ONE ...
...WHO'S IN NO POSITION TO WORRY ABOUT OTHERS.

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...CESARE WON'T KILL ME.
YOU'RE VERY CONFIDENT.
YOU KNOW THAT'S HOW I AM.
I CAN SURVIVE ANYTHING.
BUT YOU'RE DIFFERENT, AL!
THE COLONNA FAMILY IN GENAZZANO COULD SHELTER YOU.
WHY...
...DO YOU REFUSE TO PART FROM LUCREZIA!?
!?
LUCREZIA HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.

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THERE'S NO USE HIDING IT.
SO THE ONE YOU LOVE IS...?
JUVENIA.
HOW LONG WERE YOU THERE...?
THAT'S RIGHT. IT'S MY SISTER.
I SEE...
I KNOW HOW HARD IT IS...
MY HEART, TOO, HAS SUFFERED FROM THOSE FEELINGS.
SO I WILL SYMPATHIZE WITH YOU, ALFONSO.

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I CAME TO TELL YOU THE SAME THING AS SANCIA.
MY BROTHER INTENDS TO ENLARGE PAPAL RULE.
TO GET THAT, HE'LL DO ANY-THING...
BUT MY BROTHER IS FAR FROM ME, NOW...
!
YOU...? YOU DON'T MEAN IT.
BUT, THEN—
WILL YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE DARKNESS AND LEAVE HERE, ALFONSO?
THE FASTER, THE BETTER.
CESARE ...
...IS THAT KIND OF PERSON.

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PRINCE.
THE COAST IS CLEAR.
HURRY!
And after working out to this late at night!
YOU HAVE NO SENSE OF URGENCY, DO YOU!?
WHY ARE YOU WASTING TIME GAZING AT THE SKY?
NO.
I WAS JUST THINKING HOW THE MOON IS LIKE A WOMAN.
WHAT !?
IT SEEMS SO QUIET...
...BUT IT GIVES OFF SUCH A STRONG LIGHT...TO BANISH THE DARKNESS

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XI
HEY, THAT NEW FELLA'S ALL BY HIMSELF
LET'S INVITE HIM TO JOIN US.
TCH.
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY LET HIM IN.
I HEARD THE YOUNG MASTER ASKED FOR HIM IN PARTICULAR.
HE'S SAID TO BE ON A WHOLE OTHER LEVEL FROM US.
What are these kids?
Ga ha ha ha!
OH YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT.
FOOL, THAT'S NO GOOD
YOU CAN'T CUT CARDS WITH ONE HAND.

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SO, YOU'RE THE NEW GUY WHO BEAT SIX OF US ALL ALONE, HUH?
GRAB
I WAS EXPECTING A GIANT TO STEP THROUGH THE DOOR..BUT YOU'RE JUST A PRETTY BOY, ARENTCHA?
WHAT KIND OF TRICK DID YOU USE TO PULL IT OFF?

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OH...
HUH?
WHAT IS IT, MARIO?
I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOUR REST TIME.
BUT... THERE'S FIGHTING IN THE BARRACKS.
THEY'RE ALL GANGING UP ON THE NEW GUY... IF WE DON'T STEP IN—
OH, IS THAT ALL?
LEAVE IT BE. JUST LEAVE IT BE.
GENER-AL!?
YOU SURE YOU SHOULDN'T STOP THEM?
HE'S THE SPECIAL TALENT BROUGHT INTO THE RANKS AT YOUR REQUEST, REMEMBER?

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SIGNOR NARDI?
IF HE DIES THERE, IT'LL SHOW THAT'S ALL HE COULD OFFER.
STRIDE
YOUR NAME IS MARIO, RIGHT?
WOULD YOU PLEASE SHOW ME TO THE BARRACKS?
Y... YES, SIR.
AS AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE, LADY CATERINA, I MUST KEEP DAMAGE TO YOUR MEN AT A MINIMUM.
SOME-THING MUST BE DONE.
AFTER ALL, I FEEL I'VE THROWN A WOLF IN AMONG YOUR PACK OF DOGS.

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BLUFFING IS A MUST IN THIS SITUATION.
THERE'S NO NEED.
I know the time and place for these things
BUT, REALLY... YOU'VE GOT A BAD REPUTATION.
THEY CAME AT ME WITH SWORDS...BUT I DIDN'T KILL THEM, YOU KNOW.
COME. I'LL TEND TO YOUR WOUNDS.
I KNOW HOW TO GET BY WITHOUT TAKING MUCH DAMAGE.
THE WOUNDS AREN'T AS BAD AS THEY LOOK.
THIS MEANS...
...HE'S UNDERGONE SOME RIGOROUS TRAINING.
JUST WHO ARE YO—
OUTSIDE, TO WASH MY FACE.
!
WHERE ARE YOU GOING ...?

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YOU'VE SAVED ME TWICE, NOW.
THANK YOU, NARDI.
SUPER-IOR.. RIGHT.
You look like a kid
THANKS, I GUESS.
AS YOUR SUPERIOR, I CAN'T JUST LEAVE YOU ALONE.
WELL, YOU'RE IN DANGER.
WHY'RE YOU FOLLOW-ING ME?
MARIO, IS IT?

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HEY, YOU'R REALLY INCRED IBLE.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU KNOW SIGNOR NARDI.
UNLIKE OUR GENERAL, SIGNOR NARDI'S A TRUE SOLDIER.
EVERYONE KNOWS HE'S SUPERIOR. HE'S THE KIND OF GUY—
H...HEY, THOSE SCARS..
THOSE AREN'T... FROM JUST NOW, RIGHT...?
I WON'T HIDE THEM.
IF I OFFEND, YOU'D BEST STAY AWAY FROM ME.

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IT'S A SALVE MY MOM TAUGHT ME TO MAKE. IT REALLY WORKS!
I MEANT TO GIVE IT TO YOU, BEFORE... SO, HERE.
WHAT IS IT?
HERE.
TAKE IT WITH YOU.
IT'S PROBABLY NOT ENOUGH.
BUT...
!
WELL.
IT'S BETTER THAN NOTHING. DON'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD!

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!
BUT WHY CHIARO!?
THERE ARE PLENTY OF OTHER GUYS! I'M THE ONE WHO FOUND HI—
LOUIS XII AND HIS FRENCH ARMY ARE NEARING MILAN AS WE SPEAK.
AS A MEMBER OF THE SFORZA FAMILY, I HAVE TO PROTECT IT!
OTTA-VIANO!
THIS IS THE CHAMBER-LAIN OF IMALO, NARDI'S...
...ONE AND ONLY WISH.
YOU'LL DO THIS FOR HIM, RIGHT?
CHIARO ?

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IF MILAN FALLS...
...A SHOWER OF SPARKS WILL FLY ONTO FORLI, AS WELL.
AT THE POPE'S CALL, SPAIN AND THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE WILL CONSPIRE WITH LOUIS XII.
BUT, WHILE MOST OF ITALY'S NATION STATES STAND BY THE POPE, THE ONE DEEPENING THE ISOLATION IS MILAN WHICH IS RULED BY SIGNOR IL MORO, LADY CATERINA'S UNCLE.
AS LONG AS THE VATICAN IS INVOLVED.
THE VATI-CAN?
THE VATICAN EXPECTS TO UNIFY THE ROMANIAN TYRANTS UNDER THE POPE.
SO, HOW IS THE SON OF THE POPE WHO IS ACCOMPANYING LOUIS XII, CESARE BORGIA, GOING TO REACT?
!
TAKING THAT INTO ACCOUNT ...
THERE'S NO DOUBT THIS PLACE WILL BE ENGULFED IN WAR.

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IL MORO, DUKE OF MILAN, IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
HE'LL JUST FLEE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ENEMY.
SO, THE FRENCH ARMY HAS FINALLY COME TO OUR CITY.
WHAT WILL HAPPEN ...?
THAT FLEUR-DE-LIS.
IT'S LOUIS... AND THE FRENCH ARMY.
MURMUR
IT'S HIM.
IN A WAY, THAT IS WISE OF HIM.
I'M SURE THE MILAN GOVERN-MENT KNOWS EXACTLY HOW FUTILE...
...THEIR RAGTAG BAND OF MERCEN-ARIES IS AGAINST OUR FIRST-CLASS FRENCH ARMY.
THIS IS ALL DUE TO THE POPE PUTTING A GOOD WORD FOR US.
SIGNOR CESARE, I MUST THANK YOU.
I HUMBLY ACCEPT.

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OHER
SH!
NOT SO LOUD!
THE FRENCH ARE SAVAGES!
AAAW, WHAT A THING TO DO.
THAT STATUE IS NOT JUST ANY CARVING.
THE GREAT LEONARDO DA VINCI CREATED IT.
It wasn't even finished.
W-WHAT BUSINESS DO YOU HAVE, COMING TO SUCH A HUMBLE CHURCH?
FATHER, IT'S AN EMER-GENCY!
LOUIS XII HAS COME HERE!

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HRM.. I HAVE HEARD THAT THIS CHURCH ...
...HAS A MURAL BY THE RENOWNED ARTIST, LEONARDO DA VINCI.
IS...
IS THAT SO? WELL—
I WAS HOPING YOU WOULD SHOW IT TO ME.
RUMOR THAT THIS DEPICTION OF CHRIST'S "LAST SUPPER"...
...IS THE MOST OUTSTANDING RELIGIOUS PAINTING OF ALL, HAS EVEN REACHED MY HOME-LAND OF FRANCE.
HOW VERY KIND OF YOU.
THIS WAY.
DON'T TELL ME HE PLANS TO CONFISCATE THAT PAINTING, TOO.
HE CAN'T.
IT'S PAINTED RIGHT ONTO THE ALL. HE CAN'T ET HOLD OF IT THAT EASILY.
YOUR HIGH-NESS.
I'M GOING TO WAIT OUTSIDE.
OH?
YOU'RE NOT COMING?
THAT'S RIGHT.
I MIGHT BATHE MYSELF IN THE GARDEN'S AFTERNOON SUNLIGHT.

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I BEG YOUR PARDON.
YOU'RE JUST SO RIVETING...
STARING LIKE THAT...
...IS RUDE, YOU REALIZE. WHAT DO YOU WANT?
RIVET-ING?
YES, ACTUAL-LY...
...WHEN IT COMES TO LIVING THINGS, IT'S NOT SO MUCH THEIR EXTERIOR THAT CHARMS ME, BUT WHAT LIES BENEATH...THE MYSTERY.
I AM AL-WAYS ...
. . .TRAINING MY EYES TO EXPOSE THAT
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW A CONTRAP-TION WORKS, YOU DISAS-SEMBLE IT.
AND IF YOU WANT TO DRAW SOMEONE, YOU DIG UP THE MUSCLE AND BONE BENEATH THE THIN LAYER OF SKIN.
I HAVE DISSECTED COUNTLESS CADAVERS FOR JUST THIS PURPOSE.

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I SEE RIGHT INSIDE OF YOU.
THAT YOU ARE NOT HUMAN.
I SEE NO HARM IN IT.
IT'S NOT LIKE I INTEND TO STAY IN THIS TOWN FOR MUCH LONGER.
YOU'RE A STRANGE MAN...
...ADMITTING TO A TOTAL STRANGER THAT YOU DO AS YOU WILL, AND FEAR NO GOD.
SWOOSH
VOLPE.
WHAT AN UNCOUTH WAY TO SPEAK TO MY MASTER CESARE!

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IT'S AL-RIGHT.
LOWER YOUR SWORD.
I WANT TO HEAR HIS STORY.
SO...
I'M NOT HUMAN?
MY PARDONS FOR TAKING SO LONG TO DRAW WATER FOR YOU.
WHO IS THIS MAN, AND WHAT DID HE DO TO YOU?
...THAT I'M A DEMON OR SOME-THING?
ARE YOU INSINU-ATING ...
IF YOU'RE SAYING I'M NOT HUMAN.
THEN WHAT AM I?

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IT IS AN EXISTENCE EXTREMELY FAR FROM GOD.
AND YET EXTREMELY CLOSE...
IT...
...KNOWS ETERNAL LONELINESS.
IT'S MORE LIKE...
...A SOUL SUFFERING AS IT DRIFTS BETWEEN WORLDS.
I'M SURPRISED. AFTER WHAT YOU SAID EARLIER..
...YOU SAY YOU BELIEVE IN "GOD"?
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE GOD OF ORGANIZED RELIGION.
IF I HAD TO SAY, NATURE IS THE CLOSEST THING TO A "GOD" THAT I HAVE.
BUT ...
...I DID MANAGE TO CAPTURE IN A PAINTING THE MOST CRUCIAL MOMENT OF A CERTAIN MAN'S LIFE.
A CERTAIN MAN?
JESUS ...
... CHRIST.

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JUST LOOK AT IT.
"THE LAST SUPPER" AS PRESENTED BY A MASTER'S HAND.
OH, SO YOU'VE DECIDED TO JOIN US, SIGNOR CESARE.
IT'S THE MOMENT WHERE CHRIST SAYS TO HIS DISCIPLES, "THERE IS ONE AMONGST YOU WHO WILL BETRAY ME." DON'T THE CHARACTERS SEEM READY TO JUMP OUT OF THE PAINTING?
IT'S LIKE THEY'RE ALIVE IN THERE.
JUST AS HE SAID, JESUS' SUFFERING WAS SOMETHING NO ONE ELSE COULD EASE
SIGNOR DA VINCI DID A MAGNIFICENT JOB PORTRAYING THAT MOMENT
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN, CHAPTER 13.
WHAT?
"WHITHER I GO,
THOU CANST NOT FOLLOW ME, NOW."

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CHRIST IS ALONE, IN THE CENTER OF THE PAINTING.
THAT MAKES HIS ISOLATION ALL THE MORE PROMINENT.
INDEED, THAT IS...
...AN ETERNAL ...
...LONELI-NESS.

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...ACROSS THIS SPARKLING LOVE. STAY A WHILE WITH YOUR BLUE EYES.
AND WHILE MY BODY TREMBLES WITH THE JOY I SING OF—
THE GLISTENING BLUE SEA IS YOUR EYES.
THE SWEET SIGH OF A MAIDEN, CAUSING RIPPLES...
OOH! A PULCI-NELLA*!
PULCI-NELLA!
PULCI-NELLA!
*Italian for clown
I SWEAR, I TAKE MY EYES OFF HIM ONE SECOND AND THIS HAPPENS
MASTER ALFON-SOOO!
WHERE ARE YOUUU?
I SING.
WHILE THIS UNDENIABLE LOVE MAKES MY BODY TREMBLE...

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THAT...
SO, YOU PLAN TO BECOME A STREET MUSICIAN?
That was quite an audition you received.
IT'S A MADRIGAL PASSED THROUGH TIME FRO NAPLES.
MY SONG'S NOT SOMETHING TO COMPLETELY DISREGARD.
...SOUNDS GREAT!
Alright! Starting today I'm gonna make my living as a street performer!
PRINCE!
You must've lost it.
IF ANYONE COULD, IT'S HIM.

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I THINK I KNOW WHERE HE IS.
ABOUT THE PERSON LUCREZIA'S LOOKING FOR.
ENRI-QUE.
IS THAT THE ONLY REASON WHY?
Baaah.
SQUEAL!
HERE COMES THE PULCI-NELLA!
WELL, I CAN'T CAUSE TROUBLE FOR MY FRIENDS, CAN I?
I'M SUPPOSED TO BE IN COLONNA.
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE DRESSED LIKE THAT!?
GRIN
I HAVE PLENTY OF FRIENDS HERE WHO'LL HELP IF I JUST ASK.
NAPLES IS MY HOME-TOWN.
BUT HOW!?
YOU MEAN CHIARO !?

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BUT ISN'T IT GOOD THAT HE'S ALIVE ?
SO... WHERE IS CHI-ARO?
BUT YOU KNOW.
IT'S SO STRANGE ...
OH, DEAR.
Do they hate me, now?
WEIRDO!
Bleed..
I THOUGHT HE WOULD BE DEAD BY NOW...
BUT I SEE ... WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH ANY-THING?
WHY D YOU TH BORG WEN OUT HIS W TO J HAND WIT FRAN
THOUGH THE ATTACK'S FOCUS IS THE PAPAL TERRI-TORIES, THE TYRANTS HOLD ALL THE POWER.
IN THE ROMANIAN TERRITORIES, NATURALLY, THE POPE'S AUTHORITY IS DEAD.
HIS AIM H TO RAISE AN ARMY AND UNIF THE PAPA REIGN.
I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT THERE'S A MER-CENARY ...
..IN FORLI, WHICH IS AN ESSENTIAL STRONGHOLD TO ROMANIA, WHO FITS CHARO'S DESCRIP-TION.

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CAN I ASK A FAVOR OF YOU?
HUH...?
ENRIQUE.
...HE COULD FIGHT IN OPPOSITION TO ROME... IS WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?
IF IT'S ACTUALLY CHIARO...
...TO ROME.
I WANT YOU TO GO IN MY PLACE...

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THE WIND IS SO STRONG TODAY.
IT MAY BE HOT IN HERE, BUT IT'S BEST WE CLOSE THESE WINDOWS.
A STORM MIGHT BE APPROACHING, TOO.
LET'S GO CHECK ON SANCIA, SHALL WE?
ON DAYS LIKE THIS...
...MY HEART CAN'T HELP ACTING UP.

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WHAT IS IT?
!?
HUH ...?
OH.. NOTHING
I THOUGHT I SAW A PERSON'S SHADOW JUST NOW
I GOT IN EASILY ENOUGH, BUT...
...HOW DO I GET THIS TO HER?
BECAUSE THE PRINCE ASKED ME, I COULD NOT SAY NO, BUT ..
...I'M JUST NOT GOOD AT THESE THINGS.
GRRR..
GRRR..

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I... I'M...
...NOT A BAD GUY, HONEST...
YOU'RE SNEAKING AROUND ON MANSION PROPERTY. WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE YOU!?
YOU THERE
WHAT'RE YOU DOING!?
EEP!
...TAKE THIS LETTER TO LUCREZIA? WOULD YOU..
A LETTER ?
SINCE I'M A FUGITIVE, IT'S BETTER THAT SHE COME TO US.
YES, THIS MATTER ... ...REQUIRES ME TO SPEAK WITH HER DIRECTLY.
I'VE WRITTEN DIRECTIONS FOR HER TO MEET ME IN NAPLES.

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SO, EVEN IF YOU'RE CAUGHT WITH THIS, IT'LL BE EASY TO TALK YOUR WAY OUT OF.
IN CASE ANYTHING GOES WRONG, WE MUST KEEP THE INFORMATION ON CHIARO A SECRET.
AT FIRST GLANCE, THIS LOOKS LIKE THE LAME PETITION OF A SON-IN-LAW, RIGHT?
YOU THINK I'LL BE CAUGHT THAT EASILY!?
I WAS CAUGHT THAT EASILY...
SNIFFLE
WE CAUGHT THIS MAN, YOUR HOLINESS.
WHAT A CON-TEMPTIBLE MAN..
...YOUR MASTER IS!
CRUMPLE

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IF HE WANTS TO SEE LUCREZ SO BADLY..
...WHY DOESN'T HE JUST COME BACK OPENLY TO ROME?
THAT'S SOME TALK! YOU'RE THE ONE WHO ENSURED HE CAN'T COME BACK!
OR IS IT SOME-THING ELSE?
DOES SIGNOR ALFONSO DISTRUST US?
THAT'S—
YOUR HOLINESS!
BANG
I HEARD THAT ALFONSO'S MESSENGER WAS APPRE-HENDED.
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS!?

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SANCIA!
SO, THIS IS THE LETTER?
RUSTLE
ALFONSO'S WRITING...
SO, HE'S SAFE.
WHAT GIVES?
THIS IS JUST PETTY COMPLAINING. HOW BORING.
SINCE AL'S MESSENGER WAS SEIZED, I THOUGHT IT WAS SOMETHING CRUCIAL.

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!?
OH, WELL.
GO AWAY. YOU'RE AS DULL AND STUPID AS YOUR MASTER.
I DON'T RECALL GIVING YOU THE AUTHORITY TO DO THAT.
Ha!
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'D MAKE SUCH AN UPROAR OVER SOMETHING SO TRIVIAL.
SMALL-NDED YOU RE, YOUR OLINESS.
♡
IT SEEMS ...
...YOU NEED TO BE REMINDED OF YOUR PLACE.
MY PLACE ?
I'M A DAUGHTER OF THE BORGIAS AND...
...THE PRINCESS OF NAPLES.
I WON'T FORGIVE YOU FOR INSULTING MY ROYAL FAMILY, YOUR HOLINESS.
NOW, I WILL TAKE CUSTODY OF ENRIQUE.

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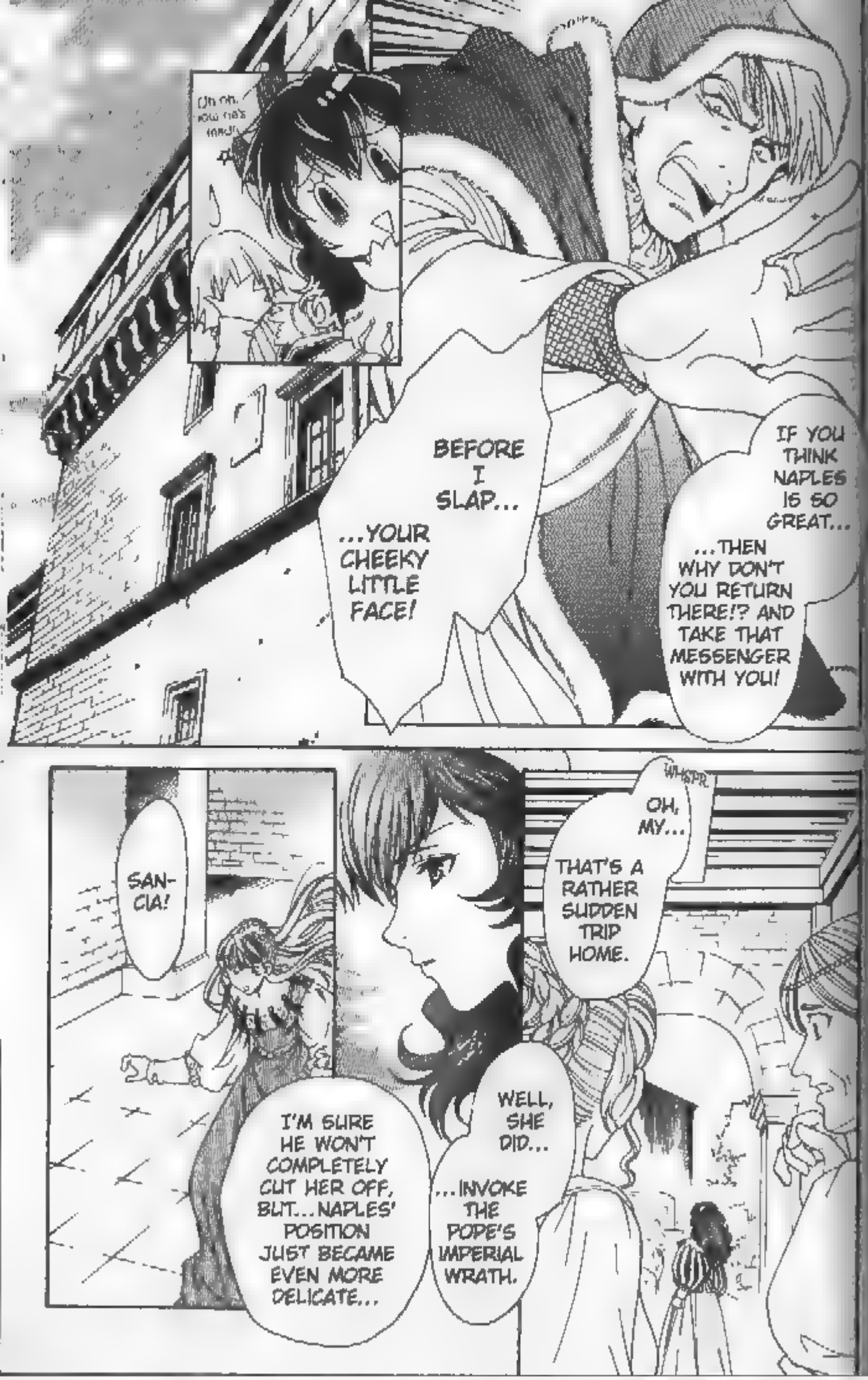
Oh oh, how has (she)?
IF YOU THINK NAPLES IS SO GREAT...
...THEN WHY DON'T YOU RETURN THERE!? AND TAKE THAT MESSENGER WITH YOU!
BEFORE I SLAP...
...YOUR CHEEKY LITTLE FACE!
WHSPR
OH, MY...
THAT'S A RATHER SUDDEN TRIP HOME.
WELL, SHE DID...
...INVOKE THE POPE'S IMPERIAL WRATH.
SAN-CIA!
I'M SURE HE WON'T COMPLETELY CUT HER OFF, BUT... NAPLES' POSITION JUST BECAME EVEN MORE DELICATE...

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ENRI-QUE.
LADY LUCRE-ZIA.
AL...
...IS IN NAPLES. HE WANTS TO SEE YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!?
I'M ASKING MY FATHER TO CALL IT OFF, SO PLEASE—
HUH...?
HE'S SUCH A DEVOTED HUSBAND.
HE EVEN SENT A LOVE LETTER, SAYING HOW HE WISHES TO SEE YOU.
THOUGH THE POPE DISCARDED IT.

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LADY SANCIA, THE PREPARATIONS FOR YOUR DEPARTURE HAVE BEEN SET.
THE ONE...
...HE CARES FOR MOST PRECIOUSLY IS—
IF ALFONSO'S BY YOUR SIDE...
...YOU HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. I KNOW IT.
...HE'LL BE DISAPPOINTED, I'M SURE.
WHEN HE FINDS OUT I'M GOING IN YOUR PLACE...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING? I TOLD YOU NOT TO BOTHER SEEING SANCIA OFF.
LUCREZIA!
FATHER.
OH!
UH, WAIT...
I'M GOIN NOW.
COME, ENRIQUE.
I NEED TO HAVE A WORD WITH LADY LUCREZIA...
I HAVE TO AT LEAST LET HER KNOW THAT CHIARO IS ALIVE...

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YES.
I'M SENDING YOU BOTH SOMEWHERE ELSE.
!?
WHY DID SANCIA G HOME?
IS SHE ALRIGHT WITHOUT ME?
I HEARD THAT LUCREZIA GOING T BE THE CONSUL FOR SPOLET
I SWEAR, WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO THE POPE?
CONSUL POSITIONS ARE ALWAYS FILLED BY CARDINALS, AT LEAST!
IS THAT LITTLE PRINCESS REALLY CUT OUT FOR GOVERN-MENT?
THIS IS EXTREME NEPOTISM EVEN FOR THE POPE

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I'M TRUSTING YOU TO BE LUCREZIA'S BODYGUARD.
ALSO, KEEP HER UNDER CONSTANT SURVEIL-LANCE.
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, NOTIFY ME AT ONCE.
I WILL HAVE HER LIVE IN A WALLED FORTRESS IN SPOLETO.
OTHER-WISE, IF THE PEOPLE OF NAPLES WERE SCHEMING, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO REACH HER QUICKLY.
NOBODY CAN STEAL THE DAUGHTER OF THE BORGIAS.
IF HE WANTS TO SEE HER...
...HE SHOULD COME BACK, HIMSELF.

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SHE'S...
...THE LAST FORTRESS LEFT TO ME.
I...
...LOVE LUCREZIA.
IF YOU THINK I'M A SILLY PARENT, GO AHEAD.
I HAVE TO PROTECT HER.. PRECIOUSLY.
SHE IS MY ONE... JEWEL.

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AND SO...
Sigh
I'LL BE STAYING UNDER YOUR CARE FOR A WHILE, UNCLE.
♡
...NOW THAT CESARE BORGIA'S JOINED HANDS WITH THE FRENCH KING
...SO TO EXPEDITE IT, NOW ...!
EVEN UNDER NORMAL CONDITIONS, RELATIONS WITH NAPLES WERE UN-STEADY...
..WHAT IS THERE TO BE AFRAID OF?
WHETHER YOU'RE THE KING OF NAPLES OR WHOM-EVER.
THINGS CAN ONLY GO AS THEY MUST.

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SANCIA!
THAT MIGHT BE GOOD IN ITS OWN WAY...YOU KNOW? ♡
I DON'T CARE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT TURKEY. IT'S RICH!
IF THEY'RE TURNING THE POPE AGAINST ME, I'M IN SUCH A DILEMMA MY ONLY CHOICE IS TO JOIN HANDS WITH THOSE PAGANS IN TURKEY.
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY.
I SWEAR, NEITHER YOU NOR YOUR BROTHER HAVE CHANGED.
COME ON.
THERE'S NO NEED TO RAISE YOUR VOICE.
NNN!
IT'S SO NOSTALGIC FEELING THE WEATHER OF THE SOUTHERN LANDS, AGAIN.

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STRUM
I WISH I COULD...
...GO HOME TO SQUALLICE.
WHATEVER YOU THINK'S APPROPRIATE.
HMM..
OKAY. SING ME SOMETHING.
WHAT DO YOU DESIRE?
OH, LOVELY PRINCES WHO SEEMS LONELY
...WOULD YOU LET THIS HUMB MINSTREL EASE YOU HEART?

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BUT IT'LL BE STRANGE TO HAVE A STREET PERFORMER SING IT.
!
OH, I KNOW!
I'D LIKE A MADRIGAL FROM NAPLES.
ONE I HAVE LOVED SINCE LONG AGO.
DON'T WORRY.
OH, MAIDEN.
YOUR SWEET SIGHS CAUSE RIPPLES...
...ACROSS THIS SPARKLING LOVE.
STAY A WHILE WITH YOUR BLUE EYES.
.....!?
AND WHILE MY BODY TREMBLES WITH THE JOY I SING OF—

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WELL, WELL.
THAT BOY. NO MATTER WHAT YOU TRY TO MAKE HIM DO, HE'S JUST SO DULL.
HE'S ALWAYS HANGING AROUND LIKE A PIECE OF DOG TURD.
AND NO MATTER WHAT AWFUL THINGS I SAY TO HIM, HE JUST LOOKS AT ME, SMILING.
I... CAN'T HANDLE IT.
BUT.
I EVEN-TUALLY REALIZED THAT...
...HE'S A VERY BIG PRESENCE IN MY LIFE.

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LLNNM...
HER LIPS...
...WERE EVEN SOFTER THAN I'D IMAGINED.
I ALMOST WANT TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR EARLIER BLUNDER!!
W... WHOA!
YOU GAVE ME A WONDER-FUL GIFT, ENRIQUE.
D... DON'T GET SO CAUGHT UP IN THIS, PLEASE.
DON'T FORGET YOU'RE STILL IN DANGER.

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SO, HE WANTS ME TO RETURN TO THE BORGIAS LIKE A GOOD BOY?
IT'S EITHER THAT, OR I DECIDE TO SPLIT FROM ROME.
IS THIS THE POPE'S FINAL WARNING?
A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL'S BEEN SENT FROM ROME... TO NEGOTIATE YOUR RETURN TO BISCEGLIE.
I JUST HEARD IT NOW, BUT...
!?
!
FWAP
READY A HORSE FOR ME.
GRIN
THAT'S A LOT OF RESPONSI-BILITY.
PRINCE!

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I'M RETURN-ING TO ROME.
I CAN'T RISK FURTHER DAMAGING MY SISTER'S POSITION.
!?
BUT!
YOU'RE WALKING RIGHT BACK INTO THE CAGE!?
JUST AFTER YOU FINALLY ESCAPED !?
TO HELP HER, I'LL GLADLY SACRIFICE MYSELF.
THERE'S NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF ANY-MORE.

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IF YOU WANT TO STAY HERE...
...I WON'T PUSH YOU. THERE'S NO REASON TO PUT YOU IN DANGER.
BUT...
ENRI-QUE.
NOT TO MEN-TION ...
IT'LL GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO SPEAK DIRECTLY TO LUCREZIA ABOUT CHIARO.
GOTTA STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT.
Even if I mess up
Sorry, sorry!
Don't make fun of me, please! I will always remain as your one and only servant!
YOU WILL LIVE IN THIS CASTLE, STARTING TODAY.
FORTS LIKE THIS ARE EVERYWHERE.

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GEN-ERAL.
IS THAT THE NEW GUY YOU TOLD US ABOUT?
THIS IS THE LABOR CAMP.
IT PROTECTS AGAINST THE ELE-MENTS BETTER THAN ACTUAL CAMPING.
MARIO.
WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?
YO.
OOH! THIS HIM!?
HEY! I LOOK FORWARD TO WORK-ING WITH YOU!
IT'S AMAZING THAT YOU CAUGHT GENERAL NARDI'S ATTENTION.

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RIGHT!
SO, BEST REGARDS EH, PARTNER?
IN MY CASE...IT WAS MORE LIKE A GESTURE OF PITY, I GUESS.
I BEGGED THE GENERAL TO LET ME JOIN THE MERCENARY ARMY OF IL MORO.
YOOOAY!!!
GEN-ERAL NARDI!
NOW YOU'RE TALKING!
OKAY, BOYS!
LET'S DRINK OUR FILL IN CELEBRATION OF THE NEW GUY!
PARTY

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PAT
YO.
GEN-ERAL.
YOU HAVING FUN, NEW ONE?
THAT'S HOW MERCENARIES DO IT.
SO WHEN YOU CELEBRATE, YOU HAVE TO GO ALL OUT.
YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN YOUR LIFE WILL END.
EVEN IF ONLY IN BATTLE, THE BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP WILL DO YOU WELL, CHIARO.
...STARTING NOW, THESE ARE YOUR COMRADES IN LIFE AND DEATH.
YOU MAY BE FROM A DIFFER-ENT TOWN, BUT...
YEAH.
I'M HAVING FUN.

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HEY, SO WHERE'RE YOU FROM?
UH...
OH, RIGHT... ROME...
OOOH. THAT EXPLAINS WHY YOU'RE SO REFINED.
I'M FROM THE COUNTRY-SIDE OF TOSCANA. THERE'S NOTHING THERE!
MY-SELF.
AAAAH.
I WONDER IF IT'LL BE LONG BEFORE THE FIGHTING STARTS.
WHEN IT DOES, I'M GONNA FIGHT LIKE A MADMAN AND PULL OFF HEROICS.
I'LL MAKE A TON OF MONEY!
HMM. AND WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH ALL THAT MONEY?
OBVIOUSLY.

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!
I'LL GIVE MY MOTHER THE GOOD LIFE.
WOULDN'T YOU WANNA LET YOUR MOTHER TASTE THE FINEST OF FOODS?
YOU'RE... A REALLY GOOD GUY...
EVERYONE SAYS THAT.
BUT IT NEVER GETS ME GIRLS.
I GUESS NOT.
HEY!
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU JUST AGREED!
LET'S GO BACK.
IT'S NOT COOL WHEN THE TWO GUESTS OF HONOR DON'T SHOW UP.

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Visit her official website in English at:
http://www.youhiguri.com

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NOW I PLAN FOR THE STORY TO REALLY REACH ITS CLIMAX, SO PLEASE FOLLOW ALONG WITH IT!!
pinch
AND IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT.
BOW
THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH!!
IT'S VOLUME 10 OF CANTARELLA!
THIS IS PRETTY LONG FOR A SERIES BY HIGURI.
Squish
...WHAT I DID WAS A LECTURE ON DRAWING MANGA AT A PANEL, HOLD SIGNING SESSIONS, ETC.
4-hour wait...?
TICKETS
THE LINE FOR THE TICKETS WAS A LONG SNAKE.
HYATT CHICAGO
THIS IS RATHER SUDDEN, BUT I JUST CAME BACK FROM A CONVENTION IN THE UNITED STATES.
COSPLAY
THAT WAS THE FOURTH TIME I'VE ATTENDED A CONVENTION ABROAD FOR JAPANESE ANIME AND MANGA, BUT EVERYONE'S SO FULL OF ENERGY THERE THAT IT REALLY MAKES FOR A FUN TIME.
And a lot that I don't even recognize
They put a lotta effort into this. There's a lot of FMA and Naruto cosplay. Even cosplay for video games.
Translator
It was more like a serious seminar
AS A PERSON FROM KANSAI, I WANNA SKIP OVER THE GAG HERE, BUT...
It's so sad now I have zippo English skills. Sorry NOVA*
Copy of a manu script

*NOVA is an English teaching school chain in Japan.

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NO, THAT'S NOT EXACTLY WHAT WE'VE DONE...
MAN, THAT'S SUCH A RABID MANGA-FAN QUESTION. THOUGH IT DOES SHOW HER ENTHUSIASM.
WOW, SHE KNOWS PRINCESS COMICS... GIRL KNOWS HER STUFF.
BECAUSE ALL YOUR TITLES ARE FROM "PRINCESS COMICS," IS IT OKAY TO THINK THAT YOU GUYS'VE ESTABLISHED A JOINT BUSINESS WITH THE ORIGINAL PUBLISHER?
ANY QUESTIONS?
BING
I ALSO SAT IN ON A PANEL WITH DAVID AND AUDRY-SAN FROM GO! MEDIA, WHO PUBLISHES "CANTARELLA" IN THE UNITED STATES.

I WONDER IF FAN GIRLS LIKE THIS ARE BECOMING A COMMON FEATURE ALL OVER THE WORLD.

AND SO, THEY ALL SEEMED QUITE INTERESTED IN THE TITLE COMING OUT.

I SUSPECT JAPANESE RARELY HAVE TO EXPERIENCE THIS.
DO ME, TOO.
How's this? He's totally going to laugh.
PROUD
Woo hoo I'm a bishonen!
You don't have to take your clothes off.
Hey, now
OKAY! NO PROBLEM!
I ASKED, AS A JOKE.
IS IT OKAY IF I DRAW YOU AS A BISHONEN (YAOI)?
AND THEN...
Hi!
WOULD YOU PLEASE DRAW ME AS A MAIN CHARACTER?

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The Fate of Cantarella

In the comic on the previous page, You Higuri depicts a convention panel she appeared on with David Wise and myself. This event took place at Anime Central in 2005, and it was at this panel, with Higuri-sensei in attendance, that we first revealed the creation of Go! Comi and announced our first four titles, of which **Cantarella** was the jewel in the crown.

Bringing this magnificent manga to an English-language audience has been a long journey for us at Go! Comi. When we started, **Cantarella** was still being released in Japan. About halfway through our publication of the series, the Japanese release was put on hiatus so that Higuri could work on **CROWN**, the delightful adventure of a would-be princess and her three dangerous protectors. We felt torn about this development, as we wanted to see more of scintillating Cesare, but we were also eager to share her new project with an audience appreciative of men blowing each other up for the sake of a pretty girl (and, er, each other).

It turns out we need not have fretted at all. **CROWN** is reaching a fantastic climax even as I write this and soon Higuri-sensei plans to return her attentions to her beloved Cesare. Indeed, we hope that this "resurrection" of **Cantarella** will soon lead to that romantic union (which we have all been pining for) between two tormented souls -- or, perhaps, to a tragic, melodramatic, and truly beautiful scene in which love is vanquished by evil (but in a really sexy way).

Whatever fate holds for Cesare Borgia, we promise to bring it to you as soon as we can. Keep checking **gocomi.com**; we'll post new updates about **Cantarella** as soon as we have them. In the meantime, we hope you have enjoyed the first ten volumes of Higuri-sensei's gorgeous drawings and powerful prose.

Sincerely,

Audry Taylor

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"Cesare & Chiaro" by the creator of "Cantarella", You Higuri.
Inspired by the winning poem.

PRESENTING THE WINNER OF

The Cantarella Poison Poetry Contest

Stolen Gaze

BY AMANDA HASSITT

With the lips of an angel, but eyes that speak of sin,
You beckon me closer to the darkness held within.
Golden orbs do draw my gaze, from this spell I cannot break,
Though I cast all else aside, it's you I can't foresake.

You are the poison in my blood, the fire in my veins,
And when the dark night falls, these flames are what remains.
Though shrouded in snow drop jewels and veiled in frosty winds,
This blaze burns ever brighter and the darkest shadow rescinds.

This heat is overwhelming, my soul cries for release,
Shattered like a fragile mirror, you broke me piece by piece.
I try to turn from those piercing eyes, try to look away in vain,
For when I try to look elsewhere my soul is wrought in pain.

What binds me to your side? What force does stay my hand?
For once I was to kill you, but now alone I cannot stand.
Your eyes have become my shelter, the cage that keeps me safe,
That when you turn to walk away, you retain my undying faith.

You walk away and leave me here, and though feeling betrayed,
Those enchanting golden orbs, I know, will lead me to the grave.

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SPECIAL THANKS

Izumi Hijiri-san, Naoko Nakatsuji-san, Wakusa Miyakoshi-san, Mitsuru Fuyutsuki-san, Akiyoshi-san, Akito Aizawa-san, Karemi Naruse-san
My chief Oda, my manager Y-sama, and the Princess editorial staff.
And to all of you who bought this book!

Address for letters ♥:
YOU HIGURI c/o Audry Taylor
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Pope in Rome,
John Paul II has passed away...
I'm not Christian, but when I think
of how one more great character in
the world is gone, I feel saddened.
It's such a strange feeling seeing the
Papal elections on TV looking just as
they did in the "Cantarella" era.

Visit You Higuri online at
www.youhiguri.com

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